

Recently, our country marked the 45th Anniversary of the enactment of the Medicare Program. Since 1965, Medicare has fundamentally changed the way many Americans access health care, providing millions of Americans with hospital insurance, preventive care, prescription drugs and other essential medical services. Before Medicare was introduced, more than half of senior citizens did not have health insurance and 25% of beneficiaries lived in poverty. Today, more than 47 million seniors and disabled people receive benefits through the Medicare system and the percentage of those groups living in poverty has declined greatly.

Despite the good it does, as we reach this anniversary, the Medicare program is under attack. Congressional Republicans, led by Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, have proposed a budget plan that cuts Medicare nearly in half, functionally ending the guaranteed-benefit nature of the program, turning it into a "voucher" scheme that lags behind rising medical costs and puts consumers at the mercy of private insurance companies. Private insurers are able to limit benefits, increase co-payments, change network doctors and manage care services – all of which does not currently exist in Medicare. The proposal also undoes the crucial reforms put into place by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), the health reform law signed by President Obama last year. These reforms include free preventative health services and closing the donut hole in Medicare's drug coverage.

According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, the Republican plan would triple the cost of health care coverage for seniors and individuals with disabilities by 2030, putting more financial strain on those who are already struggling to make ends meet. To get the same health benefits that today's seniors currently have, it is expected that seniors will need to spend half of their Social Security check within the first year of the Republican Medicare plan and 90% after 16 years.

Changes must be made to the Medicare system to keep up with the burgeoning cost of health care, but they can be done smartly, without ending the program as we know it. As your Congressman, I am fighting on behalf of our nation's seniors and those with disabilities to preserve the guaranteed benefit of Medicare. I am happy to report that I, along with other members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, have offered another option: "The People's Budget." This budget plan is the only proposal that eliminates the deficit by 2021, while preserving Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. The People's Budget would put in place several common-sense reforms to Medicare, including eliminating waste and fraud, while allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, bringing rebates on prescription drug purchases to 15% and putting an end to the exorbitant drug prices that are bankrupting patients and the Medicare program.

Celebrating the 45th Anniversary of Medicare

Written by Mike Honda

To ensure the sustainability of programs such as Medicare, "The People's Budget" achieves fiscal responsibility by rolling back the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthy, eliminating tax giveaways for corporations, bringing our troops home from Afghanistan and Iraq, and investing \$1.7 trillion in job training, infrastructure, and other national priorities.

Medicare remains one of our government's most important services, currently providing medical services to 76,000 people in our district alone. On its 46th anniversary, I am reminded of how Medicare has affected the lives of so many members of the community. Through my position in Congress, I vow to continue to support Medicare and other programs that increase Americans' access to quality, affordable health coverage.